

SYLVA SCOTICA.

PLATE I.—THE FORTINGAL YEW.

SCOTLAND is, in every respect, too interesting and too important a portion of Great Britain, to be passed over in any work illustrative of national topography; and though it cannot in the present day be deemed, as it was in former ages, a thickly-wooded country, yet the specimens of Forest Scenery, which it affords in particular districts, are so grand and impressive, and many of the individual trees of different species so remarkable, and attended with so many "spirit stirring" associations, that a much larger portion of this work might have been devoted to the illustration of them had it not already nearly attained its destined limits; even whilst the author still found subjects of beauty and interest in every part of the kingdom continually awakening his admiration, and soliciting, nay, demanding his attention by attractions which he could not have resisted, had he not determined to carry his present undertaking no farther than the boundary he originally prescribed to it, when he first solicited that encouragement in its support, which he now has gratefully to acknowledge having been favoured with, beyond his most sanguine hopes. Under these circumstances, he trusts that in devoting the two concluding numbers of the SYLVA BRITANNICA to the trees of North Britain, he shall be considered as paying the tribute of respect not only generally, to

"A country famed for industry and song,"

but also more particularly to those public-spirited noblemen and gentlemen, among the foremost of whom he would reckon him to whom his feelings of admiration and esteem have led him to dedicate this portion of his work, who are daily consulting the interests of posterity by clothing their native hills with rich plantations, and carrying into execution every benevolent and patriotic scheme that can increase the sun of human happiness, and raise man in the scale of intellectual being.

Ancient Caledonia was, as the name implies, almost one vast forest. Many of the bleak moors and mosses which now disfigure the face of the country, and produce only barren heath, were formerly clothed with woods, that furnished useful timber and excellent pasturage. "During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries," says Chalmers, "not only the kings, but the bishops, barons, and abbots, had their forests in every district of North Britain, in which they reared infinite herds of cattle, horses, and swine. There are in the maps of Scotland a thousand names of places which are derived from woods which no longer exist on the face of the country; and there are in the Chartularies numerous notices of forests, where not a tree is now to be seen." John Despaynding, the canon of Elgin, who had the honour to be the host of Edward I., claimed by petition twenty oaks out of the forest of Langmorgan, to repair his church of Duffus, which prayer was granted. From the appearance at present of Langmorgan, the undoubted site of the ancient forest, it is not easy to persuade ourselves that oaks ever existed there: yet very large ones have in our own times been dug from below the unpromising surface; and from the number of petitions of a similar nature still upon record, as pertaining to forests in different parts of the kingdom, oak timber appears to have been in great abundance, and general use. It would be as easy to trace the causes of the decay of Scottish woods, as it is to prove that they formerly existed: devastating wars, and the improvident and wasteful consumption of wood for fuel, as well for salt works, as for domestic purposes, would sufficiently account for the thinning and final extinction of vast tracts of forest land, which when once denuded, the unsettled habits of the country in early times did not allow of restoring by planting; but the object of this work is to preserve individual remains, rather than go into general inquiries: it therefore only remains to remark, that under the spirited exertions of such planters as the Duke of Athol, the Duke of Montrose, Lord Moray, and many others, the hills of Scotland must in time be clad in all their ancient magnificence, with

"——— trees of various shade,
Scene behind scene with fair delusive pomp,"

and the country enriched by those generous benefactors who seek no selfish gratification, beyond the conscious pleasure of having performed a disinterested duty.

THE FORTINGAL YEW is one of the largest and oldest trees in Scotland; it stands in the Church-yard of Fortingal, or the Port of the Strangers, so called from its being in the vicinity of a small Roman camp; a wild romantic district lying in the heart of the Grampian Mountains, comprehending Glenlyon and Rannoch, abounding in lakes, rivers, and woods, and formerly inhabited by that lawless tribe of freebooters, who setting